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VICE-CHANCELLOR

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**AJAYI CROWTHER UNIVERSITY, OYO**



**Inaugural  
Lecture**

**TITLE:**

**“SHORSH,” “SORS,” OR “CHURCH”  
- WHO CARES? ACCENTS AND LINGUISTIC  
CAPITAL IN NIGERIA**

**BY**

**BOLANLE OLUFUMBI SOGUNRO**  
*B.A. (Hons.) MA (Ilorin) PhD (Ibadan)*  
Professor of Sociophonetics

Thursday, 9th April, 2026

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# Inaugural Lecture



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CAPITAL IN NIGERIA

**Delivered By:**  
**BOLANLE OLUFUMBI SOGUNRO**  
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Professor of Sociophonetics

*The 28th Inaugural Lecture was delivered under the Chairmanship of:*

**PROF. (MRS.) EBUNOLUWA OLUFEMI ODUWOLE, FNAL, FCI**  
*Vice-Chancellor*

Thursday, 9th April, 2026



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## “SHORSH,” “SORS,” OR “CHURCH” - WHO CARES? ACCENTS AND LINGUISTIC CAPITAL IN NIGERIA

### Protocols

*The Vice-Chancellor;*  
*Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic);*  
*Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Administration);*  
*Registrar;*  
*Bursar;*  
*Librarian;*  
*Dean of the Faculty of Humanities;*  
*Dean of the Postgraduate School;*  
*Deans of other Faculties and of Students;*  
*Heads of Departments;*  
*Directors of Units;*  
*Academic and Non-Teaching Members of Staff;*  
*Beloved Students (Postgraduate and Undergraduate) of the Department of English*  
*Other Students of ACU here present;*  
*Esteemed Family Members and Friends;*  
*Honorable members of the Press;*  
*Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.*

### Preamble

Standard procedure on an occasion like this is to say, “I am highly honoured...” or “It is a great privilege for me to present this inaugural lecture.” But I am NOT honoured, neither is it a great privilege; rather, the raw truth without any embellishment, finesse, decorum, or sophistication is that I AM DAZED! ABSOLUTELY AMAZED! Who am I to be here today – physically healthy and alive, as a professor, with substance to profess – if not for God!!! *ARIBITTI ARABATA!!!*  
Madam Vice-Chancellor. Ma, this is the third inaugural lecture from the Department of English, and the second from the language arm of the Department. The first inaugural lecture in the Department, and actually the



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very first (1st) one in the entire history of Ajayi Crowther University (ACU), Oyo was delivered in November 2015 by Prof Joel Olatunde Ayodabo, professor of pragmatics, during the tenure of Rt. Rev Prof Dapo Asaju, the third Vice-Chancellor, and a man of many firsts himself. The second from the Department of English, and the 26th in the history of ACU, was delivered on September 2025 by Prof Stephen Oladele Solanke, a professor of Oral and African Literatures of the Department's literature arm. I stand here today to join the eminent class of professors at ACU, by presenting the 28th inaugural lecture, which I have titled, “Shorsh,” “Sors,” or “Church” – Who Cares? Accents and Linguistic Capital in Nigeria!

The word “accent” in this title and lecture simply means, “The cumulative auditory effect of those features of pronunciation which identify where a person is from, regionally or socially” (Crystal, 2008:3). Once upon a time, probably, like many people here, I would have offhandedly erroneously answered that mispronunciations like “shorsh” and “sors” were due to poor oral English skills or the influence of Nigeria's indigenous languages. Over my years of research, however, I have found out that the matter is much deeper. Trying to empirically find the reason(s) behind mispronunciations is what has kept me in my chosen special area of interest, that is, Sociophonetics, and informed the topic of today's inaugural lecture. Sociophonetics is a combination of the concerns of sociolinguistics and phonetics. Sociolinguistics is defined by Crystal (op. cit.) as “A branch of linguistics which studies all aspects of the relationship between language and society” (440), while phonetics is “The science which studies the characteristics of human sound making, especially those sounds used in speech, and provides methods for their description, classification and transcription” (363). Both sociolinguistics and phonetics are under the broad umbrella of Linguistics, which itself simply means “the scientific study of language” (Crystal, 283). I personally like to define Sociophonetics as the study of society and pronunciation. More



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explicitly, it is the study of how, why, which, where, what, and when an individual or identifiable demographic groups in a specific society or societies use particular accents/pronunciations (or variations of it), and the economic, political, ideological or social significance of such use(s).

Everybody speaks with an accent, irrespective of whether it is their mother tongue, second language or foreign language. Just like there are different native Yoruba accents/pronunciations such as *isu*, *usu* or *itu* meaning 'yam', so also, there are different indigenous English accents like *wa'ar*, *wader*, and *wara* all meaning 'water'. The fact is that every time each one of us opens our mouth to speak, in whatever language or dialect, the accent(s) we use reveals much of our entire social background or the one we are intentionally projecting to achieve a particular goal. In addition to the personal information conveyed with our accents, you and I, consciously or sub-consciously, use our accents as legal tender in the local and global linguistic markets, similar to the way that we use money to buy and sell in a regular market.

Before delving further into the subject matter, I need to do what is required in a professorial inaugural lecture by first giving honour to whom it is due, as I briefly narrate how I became a professor of sociophonetics in the broad field of sociolinguistics.

### A Dream I Never Dreamt

Madam Vice-Chancellor: Ma, I was raised in the University system – spent my early years as a toddler at Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria in northern Nigeria until the Civil War brought my parents back to the Southwest, specifically, to the University of Ibadan (UI) where I grew up as a campus kid. I recall growing up hearing words like “A & P”, “Senate”, “Sabbatical”, “Congregation” etc. mostly in the evenings when my parents' colleagues came to our house for informal social chit-chat, but not once did it cross my mind that those terminologies will ever become my personal lived reality in adulthood! When my father rose to the rank of



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professor in UI, we moved from a bungalow on Kurumi Road, to Saunders Road, then often described as professors' road because it housed storey buildings, which were reserved for profs., only. So, I grew up on the same street with the families of Professors Antia, Udoh, Awe (Muyiwa and Bolanle Awe), Ette, Ogunseye (first female professor in Nigeria), Okogun, Yoloje, Inanga, and most coincidentally, Bamgbose (the world renowned linguist, the now Emeritus Prof Ayo Bamgbose who to me, at that time, was simply Debola's Daddy). As expected, we children, in addition to mostly all attending the same primary school (UI Staff School), were regularly going in and out of each other's homes to play. I say this to remark two things: professors were so commonplace to me, I had no aspiration or motivation to become one. Probably because I knew them in their home setting, rather than classroom environment, the veneration that professors had with students and the general public was lost on me. As a matter of fact, if they inspired anything in me at all, it was simply dreaming of how I would become a parent when I grow up, and how my husband will always give me a loving peck on the cheek just like Prof so and so always did when he got home. Secondly, I mentioned those various names from obvious different language groups to show how culturally heterogeneous and intertribal/interethnic the University of Ibadan was at that time. A couple of those Dons I mentioned were married to non-African women. Indeed, the UI of my childhood was a sociocultural and sociolinguistic melting pot.

After primary education at UI Staff School, Ibadan, I followed my mother's footsteps and went to the same secondary school that she attended – the illustrious St Anne's School, Molete, Ibadan, then did the Joint Admissions Matriculation Board (JAMB) examination in my final year there. Although my parents preferred me to pick the University of Ibadan (UI), I chose the University of Ilorin with the secret grand plan of leaving parental control in Ibadan, to enjoy independent adventure in faraway Kwara State. Little did I know that I was signing up for the greatest, most



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shocking plot twist ever! My father, Prof Samuel Afolabi Toye, the then 5th Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ibadan (UI hadn't started having multiple DVCS, then) was appointed by the Federal Government as the 3rd Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ilorin (UNILORIN) later in the very same year (1981) that I was to resume there! The girl who dreamt of fleeing from her parents' confines ended up having the entire family going to live with her in the same city, on the same campus, for the entire same four-year period of her undergraduate existence! If I had known, I would have picked UI for JAMB, and had my first degree there.

Madam Vice-Chancellor. Ma, distinguished guests, studying English was not my dream. I applied to UNILORIN for Geography (only because I loved drawing and colouring maps, stalactites, stalagmites, rock topography, and so on) and gained admission on merit. Alas, on the morning I was to resume at the Faculty of Social Sciences for registration, my father said I should go to the Faculty of Arts to see someone called Prof. David Cook. “What for,” I asked? He said he had already completed change of course formalities for me, and I was to go to the Department of Modern European Languages to study English. According to him, if anyone woke me up from deep sleep to write an English exam, I would pass easily, unlike studying Geography where I would be required to do Mathematics/Statistics related courses in the social sciences that I was bound to fail woefully. Case closed! No discussion whatsoever! I accepted my fate, registered for English, and was taught by amazing lecturers from different nationalities: UK, Uganda, Nigeria, Cameroon, India, and Ghana. Prof David Cook, and then, Drs Olu Obafemi, Tayo Olafioye, Sam Adewoye, Kayode Omole, Efurosibina Adegbija, Steven Lubega, Prayag Tripathi, Mary Tinuoye, as well as Victoria Ofuya and Geoffrey Gogovi were the best set of teachers in the world – together, they laid an unforgettable solid foundation for my tertiary education. By my second year of studying English, I realized it was easier to score exceptionally high marks in the language courses, compared to literature courses where



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anyone rarely ever got an A. Besides, in those days, most (over 80%) students of English always opted for literature courses, claiming language courses were too difficult or technical to comprehend. Since I hated following the crowd, I went for the language option, and settled for phonology, which was considered the least popular (aka most difficult) of the language courses. At that time, it was mandatory (courtesy of Prof Awobuluyi, the eminent linguist) for all students in the Department of Modern European Languages to take subsidiary courses in Linguistics, and that is where my strong passion developed for both sociolinguistics and core phonology through lecturers like Prof Beban Chumbow and Dr (now Prof) Francis Oyeade. Those two linguists unknowingly stirred me towards the dual sub-fields of linguistics that I am standing here to profess to you today as a sociophonetician.

Sadly, my mother, Beatrice Olukemi Toye (nee Yoloye), my strongest support system, passed away in April 1984; all I wanted to do was to die too, but my father helped me understand that one best way to honour her was to make sure that I never make her demise an excuse for failure. She was Senior Deputy University Librarian at UI and later on at UNILORIN; she inculcated in me, the habit of voracious reading, especially for novels, in me right from infancy. To God be the glory, I graduated in 1985 with a second class upper, received the University Prize for the Best Graduating Student in the Department of English, and had only one dream – marry my boyfriend, Oluwatoyin Sogunro who had been courting me for about one and a half years, then. But my father had other plans; no Master's degree, no marriage!

Therefore, without any personal dream of pursuing an academic career, I completed an MA in English in 1987, at my father's insistence, then started a PhD at UI with Dr Amayo (now late) as my supervisor in 1990/1991, all just to please my father. Nonetheless, as a young wife and new mother with the cutest baby girl, ever, my strongest life ambition was just to be a loving



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stay-at-home-Mum; so, to my father's utter shock and deep disappointment, I abandoned the PhD programme midway, totally severing ties with lecturing, which I had started in 1987 as an Assistant Lecturer at UNILORIN. My answer then to anyone who asked why I stopped lecturing was that saying “shorsh” or “sors” instead of “church” was not a criteria for getting into heaven. In other words, salvation was not dependent on correct English pronunciation; to me, then, there was no life-saving, or heroic purpose in being a lecturer of phonetics and phonology.

Madam Vice-Chancellor. Ma, the title of my inaugural lecture is an adaptation of that “shorsh/sors” mantra of my younger days of ignorance. Well over ten years after dropping out of the PhD programme, I came to my senses like the prodigal son, and returned to UI for the same PhD. This time, however, the Department of English referred me to Prof Francis Egbokhare, *the* Phonologist in the Department of Linguistics and African Languages because there was then no supervisor for PhD level phonology in English. He looked at my research proposal and referred me to a supervisor – Dr, now Prof Herbert Igboanusi, a remarkably brilliant sociolinguist and multiple winner of local and international academic grants/fellowships. So, by training, I straddle the worlds of English studies and of linguistics.

Ladies and gentlemen, the fact that I am obviously standing here as a professor today to talk about what I profess, as a means of formalizing my professorial career, before this distinguished diverse audience, is concrete evidence that I finally found strong purpose in teaching phonetics and phonology. Secondly, although Samuel Afolabi Toye, my father died 32 years ago (May 3, 1994), my standing here today is an undeniable proof that the dream he had for me has serendipitously become an actuality. A dream that I did not dream is today my very happy, indescribably pleasant, and unfathomable most welcome reality. God did it – Hallelujah!



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Now that you know how I got here, and those that God used at my tertiary education level, let us jointly (you and I) attempt to see who cares whether or not you pronounce “church” as “Shorsh, sors, or church.”

### Background

Let me start by sharing a scenario that many of us can identify with. In a Spoken (i.e. Oral) English 100 level class at a Nigerian university, a student is asked to read out a short passage. The reading flows smoothly until she gets to the word, “church”. She pronounces c-h-u-r-c-h as *sors*. A few students giggle softly; the lecturer provides the correct pronunciation but this time, the student says *shorsh*, which makes the entire class burst into laughter. At the end of the lecture, the student waits behind. Obviously frustrated, and seriously concerned, she asks the lecturer, “Ma, since everyone understands what I am saying, why does the way I say it, matter? In other words, if there is no breakdown in communication, why make such a big deal about her spoken English accent.

Perhaps the examples of *shorsh* and *sors* instead of “church” sound extreme, too local and far below your level of spoken English, but are you guilty or not guilty of pronouncing words like “inteREsting” and “chocoLAtic” with stress on the second syllable, instead of “INteresting” and “CHOColate” with stress on the first syllable? How about saying “ezam” instead of “igzam” / gZ m/or “fuwel” instead “fyul” /fju:əl/ for *fuel*? Everyone in this hall is probably guilty of such pronunciation “errors” and deviations from the Standard English accent. Hence, you are also now faced with the same question that the student in the scenario asked: since every fellow Nigerian understands what you are saying, why does the accent you use matter? Who cares?

Unlike traditional phonetics, sociophonetics does not treat sound as neutral or purely physiological, neither does it remain at the level of broad categories like some aspects of sociolinguistics. Instead, sociophonetics



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asks how minute phonetic differences like the pronunciation of a consonant sound, vowel quality, consonant deletion/insertion, vowel epenthesis, stress, and intonation patterns, and so on, become socially significant, and how listeners attach meaning, judgment, and value to them. This is particularly crucial in English as a second language (ESL) contexts like Nigeria, where accentual difference is minor enough to remain intelligible, yet salient enough to induce social appraisal. The shorsh/sors/church difference is a case in point. From a phonetic perspective, we are dealing with the process of deaffrication where the otherwise 'complex' voiceless palato-alveolar affricate sound /tʃ/ is reduced to a simple voiceless palato-alveolar fricative /ʃ/ or to an even much simpler alveolar fricative /s/. From a sociophonetic perspective, however, we are dealing with the way this phonetic feature points to level and type of education, social class (whether *aje butter*, tush' [refined] *oraje páki*, *ìbókú* [local]), regional background, ethnicity, and imagined global belonging, among other things.

One of the most persistent arguments against oral English/accents instruction in ESL contexts is intelligibility. If communication is successful, why insist on phonetic accuracy? In many Nigerian contexts, speakers with strong local accents are perfectly intelligible, yet are still judged as less competent, less educated, or less professional. Some of us here will remember the popular song about the Ibadan English accent by fuji artiste, Chief Dr Sikiru Ayinde Barrister (MFR) in his album, *Omo Ibadan Kíni Sòò re* (2001):

Q: *Kíni sòò re?* (How is the show?)

A: *Sòò ò sùó* (The show is sure.)

Q: *Eran kí la je l'àná?* (What protein (meat) did we eat yesterday?)

A: *Eran síkin ni.* (It was chicken.)

Q: *Kí lai jókòò?* (What did you seat on?)



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A: *Cúsin sià ni.* (It was a cushion chair.)

Q: *Kíni sòò?* (What's your show?)

A: *Sòòsúó ni.* (The show is sure.)

In the above lyrics, Ayinde Barrister imitated the Ibadan pronunciation of the English words containing deaffrication of /tʃ/ to /ʃ/ and the change in palato-alveolar place of articulation of /ʃ/ to /alveolar/s/; thus, **chicken** and **chair** become \*sikin and \*sia, and **cushion** becomes \*cúsin. Vehement opposition ensued; not due to unintelligibility, but about how that sociophonetic interpretation and evaluation placed Ibadan indigenes in negative light. Note that the verdict was from “the streets,” not from sociolinguists or the academia. This supports the evidence that listeners often automatically make value judgments about people as soon as they start to speak. The outcry was so serious that Ayinde Barrister had to release a follow up album, *Omo Òkè Ibadan* (2002), just to defend himself against the accusation that he was parodying and insulting Ibadan speakers of English.

Interestingly, as mentioned in Sogunro (2012), the allophonic free variation between /s/ and /ʃ/ is not peculiar to Ibadan English (or other varieties of Yoruba English). In the 11th Century, it cost thousands of Ephramites their lives in Judges 12:6. They were attacked by the Gileadites who as a way of differentiating them from other inhabitants, demanded that anyone caught should pronounce the word, “Shibboleth,” knowing fully well that because Ephramites could not pronounce the “sh” sound, they would say “sibboleths”. That way, they were able to identify Ephramites and instantly beheaded them. Closer home, here in Nigeria, a similar sociophonetic judgment was carried out in northern Nigeria during the Civil War. As a means of separating the Igbo from other ethnic groups, soldiers told captives to pronounce “toro” (three pence), knowing that the Igbo would most likely say “tolo”. Those who said “toro” were released, while those who pronounced it as “tolo” were slain (Sogunro, 2012).



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Madam Vice-Chancellor. Ma, I make bold to say that although one's accent may not cause physical death today, it is certainly strong enough to induce economic, social and other forms of 'death.' Igboanusi (2017) shares the case of one of his former MA students who applied to teach Igbo in a private school but was denied employment because during the oral interview, the recruiting team observed that she interchanged /l/ for /r/ just like the “toro” versus “tolo” example, above. Ladies and gentlemen, please judge. Was the applicant's chance of employment in that school killed by her strong accent or not?

Language is actually more than just a means of communication, it is a tool for circumnavigating socio-economic power and hierarchies. Therefore, the way that you and I pronounce words is not just about intelligibility; it is a reflection of our response(s) to the multilayered and intertwined dynamics of social existence. This is especially more so in contexts where people speak English as a second language (ESL) in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Whereas most extant studies on ESL accents tend to report the issues of phonological variation as either deviant, sub-standard forms of Standard British or American English (Ubahakwe 1974; Kujore, 1990) or simply as “nativized” variations that legitimately project the ESL speakers' identity (Bamgbose 1995; Sogunro, 2012), neither of those positions pays adequate nor robust attention to the cost-benefit, profit and loss determinants behind the accents that speakers choose to use.

Based on my years of research and teaching experience in the areas of English phonetics, phonology, and sociolinguistics in ESL contexts, I have come to conclude, and thereby argue for a different viewpoint regarding phonological variation in ESL pronunciation. It is a buildup on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Just like what “capital” implies in economics, your accent as linguistic capital is a wealth-generating asset if used wisely. The difference therefore between those who persistently say “shorsh”, “sors” versus “church” is their



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(dis)regard for the value of accent as linguistic capital. In essence, rather than regard ESL accents as either errors, or identity markers, they are linguistic capital that we consciously or subconsciously trade with in our daily interactions, practically every time we open our mouths to talk. This linguistic capital may ultimately lead to financial profit (both hard currency and liquid cash) if well invested. More will be said about it, later on in my presentation.

Madam Vice-Chancellor. Ma, in the process of highlighting my key contributions to the fields of sociolinguistics, and more specifically, sociophonetics, today, the remaining sections of this lecture will touch on (i) Nigeria's multilingual reality, Nigerian English accents and pedagogy; (ii) variationist approaches to accentual variation in Nigerian English; (iii) the application of Bourdieu's linguistic capital to Nigerian English accents and an adaptation of it for an analytical framework that I tentatively call Accent-Capital Framework (A-CF); (iv) looking out for Generation Alpha in ESL contexts – translation studies, and sociophonetics; and (v) providing an answer to the question of “Who cares?”

### (i) Nigeria's Multilingual Reality, Nigerian English Accents and Pedagogy

Over 525 living indigenous languages are spoken in Nigeria; thus, it is ranked as one of the countries with the highest linguistic diversity in the world (Ethnologue 2024-2025). Non-indigenous languages like English and Arabic also exist as widely spoken languages with varying degrees and spheres of influence alongside Nigerian languages. In addition, there is Nigerian Pidgin (Naija), which has fast spread as a lingua franca across the six geo-political zones of the country. The situation today is that the various languages have relatively clear, but not necessarily iron-clad domains of use. English, being Nigeria's de jure official language, is used for formal education, governance, judicial matters, corporate business



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transactions, elite professional interaction, and so on. Nigerian Pidgin functions as a lingua franca in urban areas and a medium for informal interactions with a status of covert prestige, particularly among male speakers. Indigenous languages on the other hand, serve as linguistic codes used to convey ethnic identity, tradition and culture, as well as local belongingness. Consequently, Nigeria exemplifies a 'compound-complex' multilingual reality shaped by a history of colonialism, as well as religious incursions, and a blend of ethnic, commercial, and cultural factors.

I have contributed to sociophonetic knowledge on the active deployment cum positive exploitation of this complex multilingual reality by Nigerians in my publication titled, *Intraspeaker Variation and Phonological Nuances in the Vocal Performance of Fela Anikulapo Kuti* (Sogunro, 2025). In that work, I showed how Fela in one single song, “Look and Laugh” adroitly used the accents of at least four languages/language varieties spoken in Nigeria to speak to diverse social categories of people along the lines earlier explained. Fela Anikulapo Kuti, irrespective of his controversial beliefs and life style, is a perfect example of one who understands the value of accent as linguistic capital and maximizes it for socio-economic gains.

The English language was first introduced to Nigeria through trading (including slave trade) and Christian missionary activities. The colonial introduction of English in the nineteenth century laid the foundation for its institutional dominance. In 1960, Nigeria became independent but continued to use English for all official purposes due to its perceived “neutrality” among multifarious ethnic groups, and its utility in national integration. However, if that quality of “neutrality” ever held unquestionably true in the 60's, empirical research in the 21st Century presents a different reality. My publication (Sogunro 2022a:70), for instance, reports that Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo undergraduate speakers of English between 22 and 30 years old in Kano, Nsukka, and Ibadan, “consciously use phonological variations in NE [Nigerian English] to



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intentionally construct, project, and preserve their “Hausanness,” “Igboness,” and “Yorubanness”; thus, reducing the “neutrality” of English in twenty-first century Nigeria's multiethnic, dense multilingual space.” A second contribution of that study is that it provides statistical and diachronic evidence to support strongly, specifically at the level of phonology, the age long claims of linguists that English in Nigeria has been 'nativized' (Bamgbose, 1995), and has a “... distinct identity bound to the Nigerian soul and mind” (Adegbija, 1998:6). Most significantly, on a third level, that study on the neutral status of the English language in Nigeria demonstrates that beyond domesticating English at national level, each ethnic group has extended the nativisation further to express and preserve their identity as full-fledged sub-groups in the country.

The multiple layers of adaptation and continuous infusion with Nigerian Pidgin and 'local content' have resulted in the distinct, globally recognizable variety (brand) of English called Nigerian English. I dare say, the internet and social media have also greatly contributed to the spread, identification, and popularity of Nigerian English (NE) all over the world; not only in vocabulary, grammar, and semantics, but also in cultural expressions, and pragmatic norms. For example, Madam Vice-Chancellor. Ma, esteemed ladies and gentlemen, who would have ever imagined it possible that words like “nyansh”, “abeg”, “biko”, “Ghana-must-go”, “moi-moi” and so on from Nigeria will ever enter the highly revered, gate-keeping *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) in 2025!

Despite the recognition and acceptance of Nigerian English (NE) terminologies, phrases, and expressions, at the levels of morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, relatively lesser attention has been paid to the phonetics and phonology, that is, accents, pronunciation features of NE. Existing literature on the phonology tend to be overgeneralized, basically because they fail to take cognizance of pervasive regional variations or simply discuss them in isolation without any comparative empirical investigations. Furthermore, unlike other varieties of English in



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the Western world where discrete sound segments are customarily investigated and as much as possible, exhaustively described using sociophonetic tools, the same is rarely done for NE phonetics. My research work has therefore extended to this area of micro-sociophonetic descriptions of NE consonant and vowel sounds as a means of filling the missing critical gap in the documentation of NE pronunciations.

In that regard, Sogunro (2010) examined the popular stereotype of Hausa English accent where /p/ is pronounced as /f/ (e.g. “fafer” instead of “paper”), combining it with a diachronic study of Jibril’s (1982) findings. Results showed that after a space of almost 30 years (1982 – 2011) the /p/ versus /f/ interchange is no more a common feature in Hausa English, particularly among the younger generation of Hausa speakers of English. That study upgrades the existing empirical information and addresses a measure of overgeneralization in former descriptions of NE accent.

Sogunro (2011) is a descriptive analysis of dental fricatives to check for overgeneralizations in existing literature on that set of otherwise problematic sounds in NE accents. That particular study reports the first observation of the fact that speakers of NE tend to select their pronunciation of certain sounds based on the benefits they gain from the use of Standard English pronunciation. The explanation I gave then is that the pronunciation of some words in a speech community is directly linked with “social power values” (Sogunro, 2011: 42). That phrase “social power values” today is better explained as linguistic capital, but as I will show later, it is best described as Accent-Capital. That study recommends that comparative studies of the pronunciation of NE sounds by the older and younger generations is necessary for accurate descriptions of NE accents. That call for intergenerational comparative sociophonetic research is more pertinent and urgent today, with the emerging language dynamics of Generation Alpha.

Expanding my contributions to knowledge on the microscopic empirical



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description of consonant sounds in NE, Sogunro (2015) is a work that investigates the sociophonetic variations in the articulation of the voiceless palato-alveolar fricative sound /ʃ/ by young speakers of NE. Moving from consonant sounds in NE to the quantitative analysis of vowel sound variations in NE accent for the purpose of contributing to knowledge on the empirical micro-descriptions, Sogunro (2020a) reports on sociophonetic investigations on central vowels in NE. In an article titled, Approximants in Nigerian English, Sogunro (2020b) contributes to knowledge on the sociophonetic description of NE sounds by collating otherwise scattered data in extant publications containing any information on approximants, thereby harmonizing and expanding data on that class of sounds in NE.

Considering that language is living and highly dynamic, continued investigations like the above are crucial, and non-negotiable for any serious and precise description of real-time language. In actual fact, governments in the UK, the USA, Australia, Canada, and even East Asian countries regularly fund such research through broader programmes in linguistics, social sciences, and the humanities.

Here now lies the irony of NE pronunciation. Whereas NE words and expressions such as “send-forth” (send-off), “severally” (several occasions/repeatedly), “rub minds” (to jointly consider a matter/to confer), “next tomorrow” (the day after tomorrow), “put to bed” (give birth to a child) that were previously considered as aberrations are now officially recognized by OED (2020), NE accents have not gained the same official recognition. Consequently, Standard British English (or sometimes American English in a few private schools) remains the official teaching model in schools, and for assessment of oral English examinations at all levels of education. Despite the oral English curriculum, beyond class evaluation purposes, very few students want to speak the way they are taught in the Oral English lesson. The excuse of



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ESL learners of English in the 20th Century (Oke, 1970), to date, in the 21st century (Ayodabo 2019), is that when outside the Oral English class, speaking with a learnt British accent sounds like an affectation – pretentious, unreal – it is also mocked and generally unacceptable in Nigerian society.

My classroom observations confirm the above. In addition, students are more willing to concede a bit when it comes to segmental features (i.e. consonant and vowel sounds), but they resist learning or using suprasegmental features, especially the rhythm and intonation patterns of native-English speech. Many regular Nigerians don't want to be caught dead saying “What's in the cart ↑ ?” with a rising tone and British stress-timed rhythm, in everyday conversation, instead of “What is in the cart ↓ ?” with a falling tone and syllable-timed rhythm characteristic of NE accent. As reported in Sogunro (2014), getting students to repeat audio recordings of native English intonation is always like comedy hour in the classroom, because the students judge their speech as sounding absurd, totally hilarious; absolutely not Nigerian, even to their own ears.

Of a truth, once upon a time in Nigeria, British English accent was upheld as the “gold standard.” Nigerians who could imitate it correctly had higher social advantages, and employability ratings, while others, though equally qualified and knowledgeable, were discreetly bypassed, or considered not good enough outright. Today's reality is however radically different, not only in Nigeria, but all over the world. Employers are now more interested in job performance, skills, delivery of results, and efficiency than whether or not an applicant or employee speaks “Queen's” or “King's English” accent. Once you can express yourself in English coherently, and communicate intelligibly with colleagues from different linguistic backgrounds, accent is a secondary criteria for employment. This line of thinking by recruiters and human resources personnel supports the analytical frameworks of Braj Kachru's World Englishes (Kachru, 1985), and Jenkin's English as a Lingua Franca (Jenkins, 2000).



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In the concept of World Englishes (WE), Kachru identifies three broad categories of the English language spoken in the world, which he labels as “Inner Circle, Outer Circle, and Expanding Circle Englishes” as shown in Fig. 1. According to him, Inner Circle Englishes refer to native varieties of English as spoken in the UK, New Zealand, Australia, and the USA; they are described as 'norm-providing.' Outer Circle Englishes, described as 'norm-developing,' are the variety of English found in former colonies of Great Britain or America such as Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, Singapore, India, and so on. Most of the time, English functions as the official language in those post-colonial countries, and it is spoken as a second language by the educated speakers. The third type of English, Expanding Circle Englishes are regarded as 'norm-dependent,' used in countries such as China, Russia, and Poland, where English exists as a foreign language and has no government recognition or overt official function.

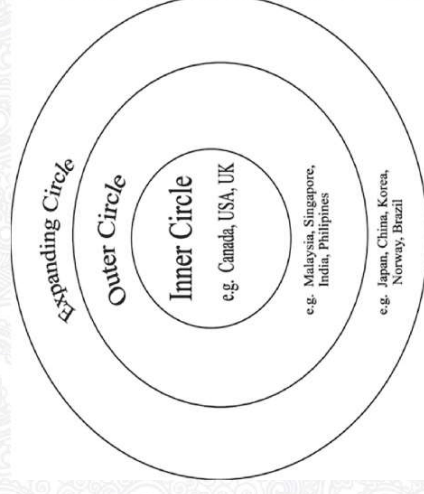


Fig. 1: Kachru's three concentric circles of English (Kachru, 1985)



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Kachru (1985) asserts that all Outer Circle Englishes like Nigerian and Indian English must be treated as valid independent forms of English rather than anomalies or deviant forms of Inner Circle Englishes. The implication is that the pedagogy of spoken English in ESL contexts like Nigeria needs to change! Rather than phoneticians like me, and elocution teachers in primary schools insisting that learners must imitate foreign British and American accents, that are socially unacceptable in real life, we should concentrate on making learners aware of the different types of English accents, and their contexts of use for the sake of intelligibility in global communication. This way, we are equipping the students with linguistic capital to trade with in different communicative settings. For instance, when I teach students the stress placement for a word like “challenge,” I tell them that the stress should be placed on the first syllable so it is pronounced as CHALLENGE, but knowing that there is a Challenge Bus Stop (courtesy of strategically located network of Challenge Bookshops) in almost every major city in Nigeria, I ensure that I add an immediate corollary: if you are in a public transport like *danfo*, *molue*, *turo turo*, *maruwa* or *keke NAPEP*, do NOT say “CHALLENGE *wáá*, o!” Instead say, “chaLLENGE, *wáá*, o!” to avoid missing your chance to alight from the vehicle.

The tenet of ‘English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)’ in Jenkin’s (2005) is that the goal of teaching English pronunciation is for it to be intelligible to non-native speakers (NNS) of English, rather than aim to speak with a native English accent. Based on extensive empirical data to determine what segmental and non-segmental sounds are obligatory for intelligibility amongst people whose native language is not English, Jenkins arrived at what is today called the Lingua Franca Core (LFC); that is, essential pronunciation features that will enhance unambiguous oral communication between ‘none native speakers’ of English. Interestingly, the consonant sound in “church” that is, the voiceless palato-alveolar affricate /tʃ/ is one of the core (indispensable) sounds required for intelligibility in ELF. This means that for global communication and



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respectability, those saying “shorsh” or “sors” instead of “church” need to leave their comfort zone and master the correct pronunciation. No matter how skilled you are on the job, there are certain doors and levels that can be, or have already been subtly shut against you today, because of your English pronunciations.

Oral English is important in ESL contexts because not only does it teach you how to speak more intelligibly, it also shapes how you are understood, judged, ranked, and valued in society. That is why, when I teach Spoken English, phonetics, or phonology courses in Ajayi Crowther University (ACU), today, it is always with the mind that I am not just teaching accent or pronunciation. I am equipping students with knowledge for acquiring and converting accents to linguistic capital; liquid assets that they can deploy for upward social mobility, job placement and enhancement, and for building poise, confidence, and self-esteem within and beyond the shores of Nigeria, without losing their national identity. In other words, my role as a sociophonetician of English in an ESL context like Nigeria is to guide students to communicate intelligibly, validate the authenticity of Nigerian English, and empower them for the demands of a globalized, multilingual world (Sogunro, 2017a). Your accent is linguistic capital in your mouth, invest it wisely.

The next section demonstrates how different Nigerians have cleverly and creatively utilized NE accents as linguistic capital in various situations across diverse genres, to realize profitable outcomes.

### (ii) Sociophonetic Variation Approaches to Studying Nigerian English Accents

Madam Vice-Chancellor. Ma, sociophonetic variation approaches refer to the theories and methods of investigating how differences in the pronunciation of the same sound are influenced by the social background (e.g. region, age, sex, level of education, ethnicity, social class/economic status, etc.) of speakers of the language. The central assumption of



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sociophonetic variationists is that pronunciation (accentual) differences and changes are not random, neither are they errors; rather, they are systematic to the point of being relatively rule-governed and predictable. They also sometimes convey symbolic meaning that may differ from one society to another. The foundation of the above described sociolinguistic variation research was laid by William Labov in the 60's (Labov, 1972).

More recently, variationist studies focus more on how individuals, rather than groups, use [accentual] variation to position themselves in society, and to convey social meaning, as well as change the formality/informality of context (Anderson, et al. 2022). Penelope Eckert championed the shift from demographic group analysis to individual 'speaker-agency' in what she refers to as “Third Wave” of variation studies (Eckert 2012). She also introduced the theory of **indexicality**, which postulates that linguistic features such as stress, intonation, vowel length, and so on convey flexible social meanings. In the Nigerian context for example, speaking with Nigerian Pidgin accent may 'demarket' you in a formal international corporate board meeting, but be a marker of solidarity and approachability in a local, casual setting. The concept is a buildup on Labov's variation theory, known as First Wave variation studies (Eckert, op cit.).

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Based on the concepts of WE and ELF earlier discussed, it was necessary to test the variationist approaches on Nigerian English as a bonafide variety of English as opposed to an error-ridden version of British or American English. Earlier studies on NE accents for example, usually had what is called a “control”, that is, the spoken data of a British English participant to compare with elicited NE data. Furthermore, relative to the number of extant First Wave variation research works on NE accents, very rarely has the Third Wave variation analysis been used in existing studies on NE accent. So, realizing the aforementioned critical research gaps, the onus was on me to rigorously test the applicability, validity, and capability of those theories on data from ESL contexts, and encourage my undergraduate and postgraduate supervisees to do likewise. Though not directly stated that we were using the Third Wave variation approach, I realized on hindsight that most of the sociophonetic investigations of individual speakers of NE were more or less based on that approach of speaker-agency.

Therefore, with regard to the above, Sogumro (2014a) employs the First wave variation approach to investigate the claim of accent convergence in



NE accents spoken by undergraduates. Sogunro (2014b) on the other hand adopted the Third wave variation approach to examine prosodic variation employed by Niyi Osundare as an individual and artiste in his rendition of *oriki*- Yoruba praise poetry – in English medium. The Third wave variation is also used in Sogunro (2017b) to study Osundare's deployment of Yoruba/English sound symbolism in his poetry. Sogunro, Ayinuola, and Agboola (2024) employs the Third wave variation approach, though not overtly stated, in our work on prosodic features in real-time courtroom discourse.

Our overall research goal (mine and my supervisees) in the area of accentual variation in NE is to know what Nigerians do with their variety of English language accents, as well as when, why, and how they consciously or sub-consciously vary those pronunciations for socially constructing their desired personae in diverse communication contexts. Ultimately, beyond providing more detailed empirical descriptions and testing effectiveness of theories and approaches to variation studies, findings of my above mentioned researches remain continuously relevant for enacting policies regarding education, the national language question, school curriculum design, to mention but a few.

Madam Vice-Chancellor. Ma, in the course of testing out those theories along with a few other social and sociolinguistic theories and frameworks (e.g. Bell's audience design theory, Gile's communication accommodation theory, Ohala's frequency code theory, Bourdieu's cultural capital theory, etc.), I discovered that none of them could satisfactorily answer, explain, predict, or guide data interpretation concerning issues like the “shorsh”, “sors” variations in the speech of some highly learned, widely exposed speakers of NE. That is what has now led to the suggestion of an analytic framework that I tentatively call the Accent-Capital framework (A-CF). It is built on a combination of Eckert's indexicality and more particularly, Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital. The next section briefly explains linguistic capital, and why an adaptation of it is necessary for analyzing accentual variation in ESL studies.



### (iii) Application of Bourdieu's Linguistic Capital to Nigerian English Accents

The term, “linguistic capital” rightly makes one think of terminology in economics; so let me start by saying that for a long time, I have sensed a close but unexplored link between linguistics and economics because the concern of both fields (language and money) are indispensable factors in human existence. It is no wonder therefore, that my very first venture into interdisciplinary research, outside the humanities, was with a colleague in the Department of Economics at ACU. Sogunro and Joseph (2022b) considered the consequences of monetary and language-related responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to sustainable development. Findings of that contribution to interdisciplinary study reveals that wrong sociolinguistic and financial decisions are invariably harmful for sustainable development. The article therefore recommends that during future crises, better communication in multilingual communities, along with fairness in the implementation of economic decisions will ensure long term progress.

In harnessing my thoughts while developing this lecture, I have had cause again to come from the angle of economics, and, as a result, now thinking of championing the cause for a field of interdisciplinary enquiry called **econolinguistics** i.e. the study of language using economic concepts; how language influences economic activity and vice-versa.

Linguistic capital, as introduced by Bourdieu, refers to the social value that people attach to certain varieties of a language or to entire languages in a particular society. For instance, some accents are regarded as possessing higher value than others in terms of legitimacy, authority, and prestige. Like real life currency, not all languages or accents are equally valued (e.g. the dollar versus naira). Some languages and accents are considered legitimate, authoritative, and prestigious, while others are viewed as unimportant, inappropriate, or inferior. In Nigeria for instance, the general opinion is that Nigerian Pidgin is inappropriate in highly formal occasions; it is also widely judged as being inferior to English. According to



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Bourdieu, languages are used and valued in diverse spaces, which he refers to as “linguistic markets”. Examples of linguistic markets are educational institutions, the media, offices, public events, social media, government organizations, and so on. In such settings, one’s accent can give them an edge over others or lead to negative perceptions of their person and abilities.

I first came across the works of Bourdieu over 10 years ago when I was studying the Nollywood film, *Jenifa* (2008) and how the writer, Funke Akindele dexterously employed phonological features as central building blocks for characterization, especially for the creation of Sulia (aka Jenifa) – a dynamic character whose growth/ transformation from a “bush girl” (*arā oko*) to “city girl” (*arā̀kò*) was strongly reflected in her accentual variations in both the English and the Yoruba languages (Sogunro, 2016). Bourdieu’s social theory of multiple capitals was most useful in understanding, analyzing, and explaining the purpose, and direction of language (accent) change in the village Sulia versus the city Sulia (Jenifa).

Bourdieu asserts that economic capital is not the only determinant of power in society; rather, the dynamics of power are dependent on the interaction or possession of multiple capitals, which can be converted from one to the other. The capitals are: economic capital i.e. money and objects used to produce goods and services; social capital i.e. the people one knows, social networks; cultural capital constitutes informal interpersonal skills, habits, manners, tastes, linguistic codes; level and types of education, and general lifestyle based on upbringing; symbolic capital refers to the use of symbols to legitimize the other types of capital that one possesses. Conversion of capital takes place if for example, educational credentials (cultural capital) enable a person to get a high paying job, or if someone in my social network group (social capital) helps me to enter an Ivy League school (cultural capital). Linguistic capital is a subset of cultural capital. Each of the four capitals functions like money and are convertible, though rarely ever transferable.



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In the *Jenifa* paper, despite her sophisticated physical appearance and change of name, Sulia’s accent, when she speaks English and even when she speaks Yoruba, reveal the falsity of the refined social standing she wants to project. Examples of English mispronunciations that her polished friends condemn as lowering her value include:

1. sh' is pronounced as 's' – e.g. \**combinason* (combination), \**sweppes* (Schweppes), \**sow* (show)
2. ch' is pronounced as 'sh' – e.g. \**sif* (chief), \**lesores* (lectures), \**asualy* (actually)
3. v' is pronounced as 'f' – e.g. \**feprite* (favourite), \**lof* (love), \**slifer* (silver)
4. h' deletion – e.g. \**aigh eels* (high heels), *elloo* (hello)
5. Vowel nasalization – e.g. \**amõnt* (amount), \**tausõ* (thousand), \**mõnage* (manage)
6. h' insertion – e.g. \**horite* (alright),
7. Consonant cluster simplification – e.g. \**ekis* (excuse), *test* (text), \**secy* (sexy), \**esam* (exam), *bet* (belt), \**esally* (exactly), \**infat* (in fact)
8. Consonant deletion in word final position – e.g. \**bi \*ge* (big girl), \**ki di sange* (keep the change),
9. Epenthesis (vowel insertion) – e.g. \**silifa* (silver),
10. Consonant insertion – e.g. \**stry* (try), \**yelse* (yes)

It is highly significant that Jenifa’s (Sulia) Yoruba language accent draws out negative value judgment from her classy, powerful friends on campus and belittle her social worth, including that of her friends’. Listen to how Becky, one of Jenifa’s cultured city friends puts it, when Jenifa tries to apologise in Yoruba for a mistake:



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BECKY: Shut up! I've always told you to speak proper language.  
“*E mó binú, e mó binú*” every time! [You should say] *E má binu!*  
You can hardly speak proper English or Yoruba language! Now, your local attitude is affecting me and my friends!

The above outburst confirms that despite intelligibility being in place, the type of accent one uses in whatever language is significant linguistic capital that can raise or lower a person's status AND the status of those they closely associate with.

The difference in Jenifa's pronunciation of just one single vowel /o/ instead of /a/ in the sentence, “*e mó binú*”, (Don't be angry) is what irked her enlightened friend. Coincidentally, other examples of none “proper Yoruba” accent in the data that were judged as “local attitude [that] is affecting me and my friends” are similar to the “shorsh/sors” variation in the title of this lecture as presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Examples of Yoruba pronunciations judged as “improper” by sophisticated characters in Jenifa**

SPELLING OF SOUND	LOCAL ACCENT (LOW VALUE /BAD LINGUISTIC CAPITAL)	“PROPER” ACCENT (HIGH VALUE/GOOD LINGUISTIC CAPITAL)
<S><š/sh>	sòsò so wà sibi aso esé	shóso (Did you say...?) sho wà (Are you fine?) Shíbi (spoon) Asho (cloth) Eshé (thank you)
<ŋ><e>	ńńen rí ọ	ńńen rí e (let me see you)
<ŋ><o>	to bá	to bá... (if you...)



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If supposed semi-illiterates know the worth of certain accentual features like not saying “shorsh” instead of “church,” and would readily change to high value accents to improve their economic, cultural, social, or symbolic value in life, it seems strongly naïve for an educated and widely travelled speaker of NE to think no one cares if they continue to pronounce “church” as “shorsh” or “sors” just because intelligibility 'appears' not to be affected.

Madam Vice-Chancellor. Ma, here now is where the tension lies between Bourdieu's theory and the reality of ESL multilingual contexts like Nigeria. First and foremost, Bourdieu's theory, as greatly effective as I have found it, is based on a relatively monolingual setting where, amongst other things, Standard French is the dominant national and official language. Thus, while Bourdieu's theory adequately explains why people like Jenifa and her friends, as well as most of us listening to me today, vary our public accent from a non-Standard to Standard one, it falls short of satisfactorily accounting for why some people refuse to improve/change their spoken English pronunciation, irrespective of what Bourdieu refers to as Habitus (i.e. a subconscious habitual behaviour linked with one's intuitive character and way of thinking; often associated with family background and upbringing).

Two principal factors responsible for the above may be: (1) densely multilingual countries such as Nigeria, where English exists as an entrenched second language, have multiple competing linguistic markets; therefore, speakers easily move between markets, choosing where to invest linguistic effort. In other words, speakers are able to exercise agency, which Bourdieu's theory tends to downplay. (ii) ESL speakers may be making cost-benefit decisions about linguistic capital; if the return on investment (ROI) is low, they refuse to make the effort to upgrade their accent beyond the level of intelligibility. Unfortunately, what such people do not realize is that they can never go wrong or incur any loss by improving on their accent even though the aim is not to sound like a



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British, Australian, Canadian, or any other variety of Inner Circle Standard English.

Based on the observed inadequacy of Bourdieu's linguistic capital to fully capture realities of ESL in multilingual contexts, I cautiously suggest an extension of it through an analytical framework that I tentatively call the Accent-Capital Framework (A-CF). The framework is structured to identify the specific phonetic selections that people make in their choice to change or retain parts of their accent based on their perceived value of that change to their environment, social life, aspirations, and occupation.

### Accent-Capital Framework (A-CF)

The Accent-Capital Framework (A-CF) provides an analytical structure for processing data and determining why some highly proficient speakers of ESL tend to randomly hold on to, or let go of certain non-standard pronunciations. As earlier mentioned in this lecture when I spoke about Nigeria's multilingual reality, I first observed the curious tendency in Sogunro (2011, 2012) where I explain that when certain English words carry “social power value” for an individual, all the sounds in that word, including the prosodic features, will be pronounced with Standard English accent. Although the finding was based on analysis of educated undergraduate speakers of ESL in Nigeria, the conclusion about words with social power value is applicable to all social groups, in possibly all World Englishes.

To explain the phenomenon, verbatim, the way it appears in Sogunro (2012: 118), certain English words in ESL contexts carry

... a bundle of messages to the pocket, stomach, emotions, wardrobe, and hormones of the hearer; it can determine overall social status and even spiritual affiliations among peers of the immediate and extended social group. Such a social power word in that speech community is typically articulated with the highest



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possible form of fineness; meeting the standard of the most elite variety possible.

Part of the purpose of A-CF is therefore to discover those words with “social power value” as a guide to unravelling what aspects of their accent individual speakers (or groups) favour as a profitable resource for social and, or professional purposes, and why.

To reiterate the key message of this lecture, in making decisions about pronunciation, a speaker weighs the potential benefits (e.g. greater respect, career opportunities, or social mobility) against the costs, which may include articulatory effort, moving out of their linguistic comfort zone, criticism or mockery from fellow non-Standard users of English accent, to mention but a few. When a speaker's current accent is already intelligible and sufficient for success in their relevant environments, there is little motivation to change it. In essence, accent choice is not simply a matter of ability, but an intentional (though sometimes unconscious) decision based on the perceived value of pronunciation within different social and professional contexts.

Work is currently ongoing to provide details of the various practical ways (a roadmap) that A-CF can be employed for analyzing data for diverse forms of sociophonetic research at undergraduate and postgraduate degree levels.

### (iv.) Looking Out for Generation Alpha in ESL Contexts: Translation Studies and More

The Alpha Generation, also known as Generation Alpha or Alpha Gen refers to children born between 2010 and 2024. They are described as the first generation to grow up entirely with global digital media and digital devices used for every aspect of life, including learning. Unlike older



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generations of speakers of ESL, many of whom learnt English in the classroom through non-native speaker models, Gen Alpha are incessantly exposed to an assorted variety of English accents, from all over the globe on social media platforms such as TikTok, virtual gaming sites, YouTube learning platforms, and so on. Consequently, they use more eclectic forms of English accents than the generations before them, often code-switching accents from native-Western English accents, to Asian accents, Pidgin English, Nigerian English etc. in quick succession, especially when alone with their mobile devices (as they usually are).

Sogunro (2025) observes another trait of the Alpha Generation observed, at least in Nigeria. It is the increasing distancing/withdrawal from speaking or learning Standard varieties of indigenous Nigerian languages to the extent that linguists “warn of the looming threat of indigenous language endangerment, if care is not taken... (94)” Based on diagnostic analysis using the Lewis and Simons (2010) framework of Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS), my own study indeed confirmed that the status of Nigeria’s major languages is either “threatened” or “shifting” among the Gen Z and Alpha Generation. I used the EGIDS to determine that the cause of the dismal diagnosis was lack of intergenerational transfer. My contribution to knowledge was therefore to offer radical solutions to cure the problem, one of which was: intense maximization of digital technology for the popularization of folk culture (i.e. songs, story-telling, dance, sports and games, poetry, entertainment, and so on).

Considering that the bulk of Nigeria’s rich indigenous knowledge and history is still stored in hallowed oral traditions, in the memories of aged men and women repositories dwelling in rural areas, the fastest way to transfer it to the younger generation is through digitalization in highly “edutaining” ways. To solve the problem of which language to use for the intergenerational transmission of oral traditions, the most realistic option



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is to translate from indigenous language source texts to English target texts. The automatic consequence of all the above is that to achieve sustainable effective intergenerational transfer, any serious attempts at translating indigenous oral knowledge to English for Generation Alpha (and coming generations) must include consideration of its prosodic rendition in the target language. Therefore, phoneticians and phonologists are indispensable human resources in any such an exercise.

Madam Vice-Chancellor. Ma, for the sake of the coming generations and in anticipation of the massive translation that will be required in the next couple of decades, I have therefore, within the last five years, extended my research to translation issues. While still holding the primacy of phonetics and phonology as being the foundation of all other levels of language, I have begun by examining the challenges of translating gospel/church songs to English, focusing not just on the lyrics but the singability of the translations. The exercise started with Igbo to English translations of the evergreen classic gospel song of hope and encouragement, *Atula Egwu* composed by Ikoli Harcourt Whyte (Sogunro, 2022c). At this point, though already acknowledged in the publication, I would like to again thank my colleagues here at ACU – Dr Njideka Ayantayo, Dr Malachy Udejinta, and most especially, Dr Chikezie Okonkwo for their help in translating the song and answering my numerous questions during the research.

Still on the journey of translation of oral traditions for Gen Alpha, Sogunro (2022d) investigated the phonological and sociolinguistic conundrums involved in the translation of Yoruba game and play songs with special focus on the singableness of those songs for young children. One significant observation from that study is that onomatopoeic sounds are culture-bound, though one would expect that the representation of cocks (male chicken) in America (cock-a-doodle-doo) will therefore be the same onomatopoeic sound of a cock in Ajegunle (kukurookuuu). Similarly, the



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bleating sound of sheep in London is surprisingly different from the sound of sheep at Sabo. So, when you have to translate the classic English nursery rhyme, “Baa, baa, black sheep” to Yoruba, will the Yoruba sheep say baaa or mèèè? That is an example of the type of sociophonetic and cultural intricacies requiring the expertise of phoneticians and phonologists for successful translations of oral folk culture. Aside from song translations, Sogunro (2023) has enquired into the thinking behind the translation of vocabulary used in two drama texts, with a view to understanding the effectiveness of their glossaries.

Without any doubt, Generation Alpha constitutes a rich site for new discoveries and possibilities in sociolinguistic and sociophonetic studies, worldwide, as they are likely to disrupt erstwhile assumptions about language and society. Indeed, sociolinguistic, sociophonetic, and interdisciplinary research associated with those two fields is about to get even more dynamic, exciting, and rewarding with Gen Alpha and coming generations. And by God's grace, I am here for it!

### Conclusion and Answer to Question

Madam Vice-Chancellor. Ma, in this inaugural lecture, I have tried to show how sociophonetics, and my contributions to the field, investigate the minutest details of our accents, and the way listeners deduce information about a speaker's background just from the way they speak. I have also attempted to explore Nigeria's multilingual reality, Nigerian English accents and pedagogy, as well as variationist approaches to accentual variation in Nigerian English. Furthermore, I discussed Bourdieu's linguistic capital as it relates to Nigerian English accents, along with my adaptation of it to create the Accent-Capital Framework (A-CF) – an analytical framework for identifying the uniqueness of accentual variations in ESL contexts. In recognition of the peculiarity of the digital generation, aka, Alpha Generation, and the urgent need for



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intergenerational transfer of cultural knowledge, I have shown how my research interest has begun to lay a crucial sociophonetic awareness required for translating indigenous oral texts to English, and also explained how Gen Alpha is exciting fertile ground for new vistas in sociophonetic interdisciplinary research.

Finally, to provide an answer to the opening question in the title of this inaugural lecture: “shorsh,” “sors” or “church” who cares? I have first of all tried to establish the fact that pronunciation is not merely a technical communication skill, it is a social tool that reveals so much about you beyond the words that you form with your accent. Most importantly, accent is a form of capital that people invest strategically to position themselves in society (or unwittingly spend carelessly to depreciate their social value and worth). Rather than cling to the erstwhile explanations of mother tongue interference, ethnic identity, loyalty, and so on, my position today, after many years of studying the sociophonetic phenomenon is that people who refuse to care about their accent (pronunciation) have a limited recognition of/or disregard for the symbolic value attached to conformity with the Standard accents (not necessarily native speaker English accent) of English within particular linguistic markets. Therefore, when we ask, “Who cares?” the simple answer is...EVERYONE MUST CARE!

Madam Vice-Chancellor. Ma, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, based on my long-standing field work and experience as a professor of sociophonetics, I hereby rest my case.

### Acknowledgements

God by Himself provided help for me through the following leaders, mentors, colleagues, students, friends, and family members whose astounding input in my life I will always cherish.



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### University Management Current and Past

My heartfelt appreciation goes to our Vice-Chancellor, Prof Ebuoluwa Oluwafemi Oduwale, (*FNAL, FCI/A*) the first female Vice-Chancellor of Ajayi Crowther University who accepted my request for a date to present my Inaugural lecture, personally approved the draft of the lecture as being 'inaugural-worthy' and compliant, then put *holy* fire in my tail to ensure that today is a reality. I am privileged to be presenting the first inaugural lecture that she will host as Vice-Chancellor in any university, worldwide. Mine is also the first inaugural lecture ceremony to be handled by our two new and very first set of double Deputy Vice-Chancellors in ACU – Prof Folake Olanbiwoninu (DVC Academic) and Prof Kayode Binuyo (DVC Administration). I thank both of them for facilitating everything about this lecture, as directed by the VC, so successfully. The Registrar, Dr Bode Olofinmugun, the innovative University Librarian, Dr Bosede Ajiboye who holds an especially tender place in my heart because my late mother was in the same profession, and the University Bursar, Dr Ayodele Olusanwo, I am most grateful for the roles you have each played in ensuring the success of today's lecture.

I thank the three previous Vice-Chancellors of ACU who were my bosses between 2013 and 2025; namely Prof Kolawole Jaiyeoba, Prof Dapo Asaju, and Prof Timothy Adebayo. Though now deceased, I also appreciate the late Prof Jacob Adeniyi, our gentle but firm quondam Deputy Vice-Chancellor. My thanks also go to Dr Mrs Josephine Oyebanji, the very hospitable, charming, and encouraging Registrar in office on my resumption of duty at ACU, and her successor, Mrs 'Nike Fatogun, as well Dr Jadesola Babatola and Dr Olusegun Ojo – all Registrars/Acting Registrar. I mention these University Administrators with deep gratitude, because each of them made working in ACU conducive and therefore productive. Most importantly, they made it easy for me to serve as three-time Acting Head of Department and now substantive Head of Department, despite my continuous acute reluctance



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and repeated displeasure, every time I was called to serve in that capacity. I preferred to be left free of administrative obligations so I could concentrate fully on research and academic publications to make up for what I thought was 20 years-lost time in my truncated academic career path. God had other plans, and used each one of them to ensure my well rounded university work experience as an academic and equally vast university administrator.

This acknowledgement of Management staff present and past will not be complete without me mentioning Prof Muyiwa Popoola, the immediate past Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Ajayi Crowther University. He patiently acceded to my repeated requests for change of dates of this Inaugural lecture. For the records, I asked for change of dates thrice because I couldn't seem to harness my thoughts well enough on paper; yet he always kindly gave me a new letter, based on the VC's approval, with a new date without losing his patience with me.

### Academic Mentors and Colleagues outside Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo

I have already duly acknowledged all my wonderful lectures in the University of Ilorin at the beginning of this lecture. So, let me start here with the University of Ibadan where I got my PhD and met many people. I remain most grateful to Professor Herbert Sunday Igboanusi who supervised my PhD thesis and patiently allowed me to work at my own pace. I also thank Prof Francis Egbokhare who warned me not to become “Professor Who” when I told him that I had got a job with ACU. I asked what that meant and he explained that I should focus on research and publishing in my special area and make a mark there, rather than writing on every field just to amass papers; thereby ending up with no specific academic identity. I appreciate Prof Akin Odebummi, a cerebral scholar whose humility I respect so much. He was the Faculty Sub-Dean when I was a PhD student and despite his hectic schedule, ALWAYS gently, and



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I have a definite memorable story to tell about every single individual whose name appears in this entire acknowledgment but due to lack of time, I cannot afford to do that; therefore, from here on, I will try my best to simply mention names, “pass and go.”

Other academics in UI whose positive impact remains in my life, starting with those I met in Department of Linguistics and African Languages, are: Prof Wole Oyetade, Prof Duro Adeleke (now at ACU), Prof Dotun Ogundeji, Prof Arinpe Adejumo, Prof Oye Taiwo, Dr Tayo Bankale, Dr Demola Lewis, Dr Titi Ojo (co-PhD student and beloved neighbour at Tafawa Balewa Postgraduate Hall), Dr Tope Ajayi, and my fellow PhD supervisees under Prof Igboanusi – Dr Esther Senayon, Dr Osy Nwagbo, and Dr Yeseera Oloso; we morphed into convivial writing buddies for the Igboanusi festschrift project. In the Department of English, UI, I cannot but thank Prof Ayo Kehinde, Prof Nike Akinjobi (in many ways, an inspiring phonologist and much more), Prof Bukunmi Sunday (Encourager #1), Prof Doyin Aguru (jejelaiye gba), and Dr Charles Akinsete (*eniyàn mi* – my personal person). I also appreciate Prof Ayo Osinsanwo whose books on spoken English and English phonetics and phonology are my go-to recommended texts for undergraduates and postgraduates in my classes.

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Very special thanks to the able Secretaries that I have worked with over the years as Ag/Head of Department who made the demands of the office easy for me to bear: Mrs Ebere Kalu (secretary turned sister), Mrs Sola Onarinde (Mrs Onus), Mrs Bose Olaniyi (a very precious 'somebody' to me), and Mrs Odunayo Raheem (assiduous and caring current secretary to the HOD). I pray that God will more mightily bless those aforementioned Secretaries for the huge blessing they have been to me.

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I salute my colleagues, teaching and non-teaching staff in other Faculties here at Ajegunle Campus, Ofa-Meta Campus, and Kiesen Campus. Thank you for always accommodating me whenever we meet. I extend special thanks to Profs Ibikunle Joseph and Paul Akanbi of the Faculties of Social Sciences, and Management Sciences, respectively. Prof (Baba) Oyeyemi Oshin of the Faculty of Natural Sciences deserves special mention for always encouraging me to rise higher, even after he retired from ACU years ago. The TY Danjuma Library staff remain very dear to my comfort and progress at ACU. I also thank all the Bursary and the Registry Staff that have ever processed my papers and requests no matter how major or minor. Thank for not once omitting my name from salary, etc. credit alerts or delaying, misplacing, or losing my files nor my memos. I salute the ICT Unit, especially Messers Stephen Olayiwola, Dolapo Sotonade, Bamidele Aliu, and Emmanuel Balogun for always promptly attending to our students' registration and result issues. May God bless their ministry.

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I thank you all for listening.



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